
Raphael Dalleo, ed., *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies*

Sam Coombes



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REFERENCES

Raphael Dalleo, ed. *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2016. 256 p. ISBN: 978-1-78138-296-7. €120

- 1 This volume sets out to chart a “sociological turn” in postcolonial studies, which the editor Raphael Dalleo dates to 2000, taking the work of Pierre Bourdieu as its guiding inspiration. This sociological turn, Dalleo argues, followed on from the Marxist materialist critique of postcolonial studies dating from the early 1990s, which had been highly critical of a leaning in the field towards an acceptance of celebratory discourses of globalization. Dalleo presents the publication of Graham Huggan’s *The Postcolonial Exotic* (2001) as the decisive moment when a new, Bourdieu-inspired sociological approach to postcolonial reflection first surfaced, one which was to be followed by the appearance of numerous other works over the course of the following decade that also drew on Bourdieusian thought in diverse ways. A re-worked chapter drawn from one of these volumes, Sarah Brouillette’s “Postcolonial Authorship Revisited,” along with a chapter from Huggan’s seminal *Postcolonial Exotic*, appear at the start of *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies* to set the tone for what is to follow. The sociological turn, Dalleo points out, grew out of “the same impulse that animated the Marxist critique” but promised to couple it “with self-awareness of its own participation in postcolonialism’s institutions” (8). Whereas the Marxist critique had “position[ed] itself as oppositional to the field’s institutional mainstream” (8), the Bourdieu-inspired turn proved to be less contestatory.
- 2 Following the previously published opening chapters of *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies*, the volume is made up of new pieces on diverse, predominantly anglophone postcolonial studies topics which incorporate reflection on different aspects of

Bourdieuian thought. The concepts of cultural capital, symbolic domination, hysteresis, habitus, split habitus, anamnesis, cultural field and other Bourdieusian preoccupations are all covered by one or another author in the course of the volume. There are inevitable overlaps, “habitus” for example being a focus in chapters 4, 5 and 9, but these instances of repetition do not detract from the quality of the volume, and Dalleo succeeds in showcasing a range of approaches to Bourdieusian influences in contemporary anglophone postcolonial criticism. Less convincing is the not particularly in-depth engagement with Bourdieusian thought of some of the contributions; although the pieces by Chris Bongie (chapter 2) and Michael Niblett (5) present stimulating argumentation on their chosen topics, their interest in Bourdieu remains somewhat peripheral. To a lesser extent the same can be said of the chapters contributed by Caroline Davis (6) and Kris Singh (8). Davis for example offers an illuminating account of the ascent to literary prominence of South African township poet Oswald Mtshali by establishing valuable connections with Bourdieu’s concept of the cultural field and views on literary prestige; yet these latter preoccupations still seem as much a theoretical accompaniment as they are thoroughly integral to elucidating the topic.

- 3 A number of pieces in the volume stand out however for their intense engagement with Bourdieusian concepts. Brouillette offers an impressive analysis of postcolonial authorship employing Bourdieu’s views on the field of cultural production. Roxanna Curto (chapter 4) offers a comparative reading of Bourdieu and Fanon presented as an “imagined dialogue,” concluding that “[w]hat Fanon adds to Bourdieu is a consideration of the role of race; and Bourdieu brings to Fanon insights into the workings of social classes and the process of symbolic domination” (102). The exercise is inevitably somehow artificial, there never having been any actual dialogue, in person or of an intellectual nature, between the two thinkers, but it is conducted rigorously and throws up unpredictable points of contact between their ideas.
- 4 Nicole Simek (chapter 9) offers a sophisticated account of the value of Bourdieu’s interest in anamnesis to literary studies, subsequently bringing this discussion to bear on an analysis of Chamoiseau’s novel *Un dimanche au cachot* (2007). Highlighting the fact that habitus in Bourdieu is best understood as embodied history and that practice is inseparable from the material space of social relations that it navigates, her analysis also covers reflexive critique and examines the relevance of these concepts to the political commitment of postcolonial literature beyond the Chamoiseau text which is its central focus.
- 5 Overall, Dalleo’s *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies* offers a valuable overview of one of the key recent trends in postcolonial theory and criticism, highlighting the relevance of different aspects of Bourdieu’s thought to postcolonial studies. As such it will be of interest to researchers in a number of key areas of the field, the historical, sociological and literary areas in particular. Nevertheless, the articles composing the book conform quite closely to a now well-known template in Anglophone criticism in its method which consists principally of applying the concepts of a renowned French thinker to material in an established academic discipline which has no intrinsic connection to them. One might add in this regard that with only one exception (Stefan Helgesson) all the contributors are based in Anglo-American academic institutions and that only two contributors are not affiliated in disciplinary terms to English Studies or exclusively English-language based disciplines.

- 6 References to Bourdieu's works are given in their English translations and one is inevitably reminded of François Cusset's *French Theory* (La Découverte, 2005) which charted the fortunes of thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault in the Anglo-American academic worlds. Is the Bourdieu we are presented with here to some extent the "Bourdieu" of the Anglophone academy, unmoored from the French cultural context and language? Certainly the overtly politically committed Bourdieu of the 1990s is entirely absent from this volume. As indicated above, Dalleo points out in his Introduction that one of the defining features of the Bourdieu-inspired "sociological turn" in postcolonial studies has been its comparative political discretion. This tendency arguably coheres with a prime focus on Bourdieu's theoretical claims rather than active political involvements. Nevertheless, it would have been heartening to be able to note that at least one of the contributors to this volume had referred to works such as *La Misère du monde* (Seuil, 2007), *Contre-Feux* (Raisons d'agir, 1998) or *Sur la télévision, suivi de l'emprise du journalisme* (Raisons d'agir, 1996).
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AUTHORS

SAM COOMBES

Sam COOMBES is Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. He previously taught English at Paris 10 University (2001-2007) and, following an early specialism in Sartre studies, his research has focused on postcolonial studies which he approaches principally from an Anglophone-Francophone comparative perspective. He is the coordinator of the Diasporic Trajectories seminar series (<http://www.ed.ac.uk/literatures-languages-cultures/diaspolinks/events>), and is a regular contributor to both French and Anglophone academic journals. Recent research has included work in the field of British and Anglophone cultural studies and politics, including papers on interdisciplinarity and current trends in contemporary globalisation.